

# **Al-Farabi's *Summary of Plato's Laws***

## COMPENDIUM LEGUM PLATONIS

Translated by Muhsin Mahdi

*Plato's Laws consists of an introduction and accounts of the first nine books of Plato's Laws. In the introduction, Alfarabi explains Plato's art of writing in general and the method he follows in writing the Laws in particular. He also states his own method of summarizing Plato's Laws, points to the two groups of readers for whom the work was written, and indicates the benefit that each can derive from reading it. In the proceeding Selections Alfarabi examines the place of laws and legislation in the broader context of political philosophy. Here, the question of laws becomes the object of a specialized study. In the guise of a commentary on Plato's Laws, Alfarabi shows the relevance of Plato's investigation of Greek divine laws to the study and understanding of all divine laws; hence Avicenna's statement (below, Selection 7) that Plato's Laws treat prophecy and the divine Law.*

*The Arabic text of Alfarabi's Plato's Laws was first published by F. Gabrieli, Alfarabius Compendium Legum Platonis (London, 1952). This publication was examined in detail and additional evidence was presented with a view to a new edition by Muhsin Mahdi, "The Editio Princeps of Farabi's Compendium Legum Platonis," Journal of Near Eastern Studies, XX (1961), 1-24. The present translation is based on the forthcoming edition by Thérèse-Anne Druart. The numbers in brackets in the body of the translation refer to the pages of Gabrieli's text, while those at the beginning of some of the paragraphs refer to the Stephanus pages and page divisions of the Greek text of Plato's Laws.*

### [Introduction]

1 Whereas the thing due to which man excels all other animals is the faculty that enables him to distinguish among the affairs and matters with which he deals and that he observes, in order to know which of them is useful so as to prefer and obtain it while rejecting and avoiding what is useless; and that faculty only emerges from potentiality into actuality through experience ("experience" means reflection on the particular instances of a thing and, from what one finds in these particular instances,

passing judgment upon its universal characteristics)-therefore, whoever acquires more of these experiences is more excellent<sup>1</sup> and perfect in being human. However, the one guided by experience may err in what he does and experiences so that he conceives the thing to be in a different state than it really is. (There are many causes of error; these have been enumerated by those who discuss the art of sophistry. Of all people, the wise are the ones who have acquired experiences that are true and valid.) Nevertheless, all people are naturally disposed to pass a universal judgment after observing only a few particular instances of the thing ("universal" here means that which covers all the particular instances of the thing as well as their duration in time); so that once it is observed that an individual has done something in a certain way on a number of occasions, it is judged that he does that thing in that way all the time. For instance, when someone has spoken the truth on one, two, or a number of occasions, people are naturally disposed to judge that he is simply truthful; similarly when someone lies. Again, when someone is observed on a number of occasions to act with courage or as a coward, or to give evidence of any other moral habit,<sup>2</sup> he is judged to be so wholly and always.

Whereas those who are wise know this aspect of people's natural disposition, sometimes they have repeatedly shown themselves as possessing a certain character so that people will judge that this is how they always are. Then, afterwards, they would act in a different manner, which went unnoticed by people, who supposed they were acting as they had [4] formerly. It is related, for example, that a certain abstemious ascetic was known for his probity, propriety, asceticism and worship, and having become famous for this, he feared the tyrannical sovereign and decided to run away from his city. The sovereign's command went out to search for and arrest him wherever he was found. He could not leave from any of the city's gates and was apprehensive lest he fall into the hands of the sovereign's men. So he went and found a dress worn by vagabonds, put it on, carried a cymbal in his hand and, pretending to be drunk, came early at night out to the gate of the city singing to the accompaniment of that cymbal of his. The

gatekeeper said to him, "Who are you?" "I am so and so, the ascetic!" he said jokingly. The gatekeeper supposed he was poking fun at him and did not interfere with him. So he saved himself without having lied in what he said.

2 Our purpose in making this introduction is this: the wise Plato did not feel free to reveal and uncover every kind of knowledge for all people. Therefore he followed the practice of using symbols, riddles, obscurity, and difficulty, so that knowledge would not fall into the hands of those who do not deserve it and be deformed, or fall into the hands of someone who does not know its worth or who uses it improperly. In this he was right. Once he knew and became certain<sup>3</sup> that he had become famous for this practice, and that it was widespread among people that he expresses everything he intends to say through symbols, he would sometimes turn to the subject he intended to discuss and state it openly and literally; but whoever reads or hears his discussion supposes that it is symbolic and that he intends something different from what he stated openly. This notion is one of the secrets of his books. Moreover, no one is able to understand what he states openly and what he states symbolically or in riddles unless he is trained in that art itself, and no one will be able to distinguish the two unless he is skilled in the discipline that is being discussed. This is how his discussion proceeds in the Laws. In the present book we have resolved upon extracting the notions to which he alluded in that book and grouping them together, following the order of the Discourses it contains, so that the present book may become an aid to whomever wants to know that book and sufficient for who[m]ever cannot bear the hardship of study and reflection. God accommodates [to] what is right. [5]

### First Discourse

1 [624a] A questioner asked about the cause of legislating the laws<sup>4</sup> ("cause" here means the maker, the maker of the laws being the one who legislates them). The interlocutor answered that the one who legislated them was Zeus; among the Greeks, Zeus is the father of mankind who is the last cause.

2 [624a-625b] Then he mentioned another legislation in order to explain that there are many laws and that their multiplicity does not detract from their validity. He supported this by the testimony of generally known and popular poems and accounts in praise of some ancient lawgivers.

3 [625a-627b] Then he alluded to the fact that, because there are some who detract from the validity of the laws and tend to argue that they are foolish, it is right to examine them. He explained that the laws occupy a very high rank and that they are superior to all wise sayings. He examined the particulars of the law that was generally known in his time.

[625b-c] Plato mentioned the cypress trees; he described the path that was being taken by the interlocutor and the questioner and its stations. Most people suppose that underlying this there are subtle notions: that by "trees" he meant "men," and similar difficult, forced, and offensive notions, which it would take too long to state. But the case is not as they suppose. Rather, he meant thereby to prolong the discussion and to connect the literal sense of the discussion with what resembles it, referring to a notion extraneous to his purpose, in order to hide his intention.

4 [625c-e] Then he turned to some of the statutes of that law that was generally known to them, namely, messing in common and carrying light armor; and he examined them, seeking to determine in what way that law was right and whether it agreed with the requirements of sound judgment. He explained that such statutes have many advantages, such as promoting friendship, mutual aid, and protection, and similar things, some of which he mentioned and some he did not; and he explained that they are<sup>5</sup> permitted to carry light armor for yet another reason: because their roads were rugged and most of them were infantrymen rather than cavalrymen.

5 [626a-630d] Then he explained that, because people in general, and those people in particular, are naturally disposed to perpetual war, carrying and acquiring appropriate arms and association and friendship<sup>6</sup> are necessary things. He explained also the advantages reaped from war and gave an exhaustive account of the kinds of war, explaining the specific and general forms of war.

6 [626d-630d] Then the extended discourse on wars led him to mention [6] many aspects of the advantages of the law: it enables a person to control oneself, to pursue the power to suppress evil things (both those in the soul and the external ones), and to pursue what is just. Moreover, he explained in this connection what is the virtuous city and who is the virtuous person. He mentioned that they are the city and the person that conquer by virtue of truth and rightness. He explained also the true need for a judge, the obligation to obey him, and how this promotes common interests. He described who is the agreeable judge, how he ought to conduct himself in suppressing the evil ones and protecting people from wars by gentleness and good administration, and that he should begin with what is most needed, namely, the lowest. He explained the true need of people for avoiding wars among themselves and the intensity of their inclination to avoid wars because this promotes their well-being. But this is impossible without adhering to the law and applying its statutes. When the law commands waging wars, it does so in the pursuit of peace, not in the pursuit of war-just as someone may be commanded to do something offensive because its final consequence is desirable. He also mentioned that it is not sufficient for an individual to live in prosperity without security. He supported this statement by the testimony of a poem by a man well known to them, that is, the poem of Tyrtaeus. He explained further that the courageous person who is praiseworthy is not the one who is first to attack in external wars, but he who, in addition, controls himself and manages to uphold peace and security whenever he can. He supported this statement by poems generally known to them.

7 [630d-631d] Then he explained that the purpose of the lawgiver's forbearance and accomplishment is to seek the face of God, the Mighty and Majestic, pursue reward and the last abode, and acquire the highest virtue which is higher than the four moral virtues. He explained that there may be certain people who imitate the legislators. These are individuals with various purposes who legislate hastily to achieve their bad aims. (His only intention in mentioning these individuals was that people guard against being beguiled by the likes of them.) [7]

He divided the virtues and explained that some of them are human and others are divine; the divine are preferable to the human; and he who has acquired the divine does not lack the human whereas the one who has acquired the human may have missed the divine. The human virtues are the ones such as power, beauty, prosperity, knowledge, and so forth, enumerated in the books on ethics. He mentioned that the true legislator is the one who orders these virtues in a suitable manner leading to the attainment of the divine virtues; for when the human virtues are practiced by the one who possesses them as the law requires, they become divine virtues.

8 [631d-632c] Then he explained that the legislators aim at the means that lead to the attainment of virtues, commanding and impressing on people to follow them, so that, through the realization of these means, the virtues will be realized. Examples of these means are legal marriage, ordering the appetites and pleasures, and indulging in each only to the extent permitted by law. The same applies to fear and anger, base and noble matters, and everything else that serves as a means to the virtues.

9 [632d-634c] Then he explained that Zeus and Apollo<sup>7</sup> had used all those means in their two laws. He explained the many advantages of each

one of the statutes of their Law-for instance, those dealing with hunting, messing in common, war, and so forth.

He explained also that war may take place out of necessity or because of appetite and preference. He explained which war stems from preference and is a source of pleasure and which is brought about out of necessity.

He mentioned tacitly in his discussion that the argument running between the speaker and the interlocutor may lead to debasing and degrading certain noble and preferable things; but what is intended by this is to examine and consider them so as to explain their excellence, clear them of suspicion, and ascertain that they are valid and preferable. This is right. He presents this as an excuse for whoever argues for condemning [8] any of the statutes of the law, providing his intention is examination and inquiry, not contention or mischief.

10 [634d-635b] Then he started to condemn certain statutes that were known to them in those laws. He mentioned that to accept such statutes, regardless of one's suspicion from the outset that they may be defective, is to act like children and those who are ignorant; he who is intelligent must examine such statutes in order to overcome his doubt and understand the truth about them.

11 [636a] Then he explained that to carry out what the law requires is one of the most difficult things, while to pretend and make unfounded claims is very easy.

12 [636a-637e] Then he mentioned some of the generally known statutes that had been laid down in earlier laws-for instance, the ones concerning festivals-how they are extremely right because they involve

pleasure to which all people are naturally inclined, and how the [ancient lawgivers] legislated the kind of law that renders that pleasure divine. He praised it, approved of it, and explained its advantages. Another example is that of wine drinking and being drunk, their advantages when practiced as the law requires, and their consequences when practiced differently.

13 [638a-b] Then he warned against supposing that the victors are always right and that the vanquished are always wrong. Victory may be due to large numbers, and they may very well be in the wrong; therefore, a human being should not be deluded by the victory but should reflect upon their qualities and the qualities of their laws. If they are in the right, it makes no difference whether they are victors or vanquished. Nevertheless, in most cases the one who is in the right is the victor; it is only accidentally that he is vanquished.

14 [638c-639b] Then he mentioned that not everyone who wishes to legislate is a true lawgiver, but only the one whom God creates and equips for this purpose. The same applies to every master in an art, such as the navigator and others, who then deserves to be called a master both when practicing his art and when not practicing it. Just as the one who is known for his mastery of an art deserves to be called a master when not practicing it, the one who practices an art without being good at it, equipped for it, or proficient in it, does not deserve to be called a master. [9]

15 [639b-340d] Then he explained that the lawgiver should first practice his own laws and only then command others to practice them. For if he does not practice what he commands others and does not require of himself what he requires of others, his command and his argument will not be received well and properly by the ones whom he commands-just as when the general is not a hero who is himself able to fight wars, his leadership will not have the proper effect. He gave an example of this drawn from the drinking party.



He said that, when their leader and master is also drunk like the rest, he will not be able to conduct the party in the right way; rather, he ought to be sober and extremely sharp-witted, knowledgeable, and vigilant, so as to be able to conduct a drinking party. What he said is certainly true. For a lawgiver who is as ignorant as his people will not be able to legislate the law that benefits them.

16 [641b-d] Then he mentioned that education<sup>8</sup> and training are useful in preserving the laws and that the one who neglects himself or his subordinates will end up in great confusion.

17 [641e-642a] Then he explained that when a person becomes generally known for his ability as a good dialectician and discussant and as a copious speaker, then whenever he turns, to praise and describes a thing as being excellent, it will be suspected that the thing itself is not so excellent as he describes but that his description of it results from his ability as a discussant.

This is a disease that often afflicts the learned. Thus the one who listens to a discussion must use his intellect to reflect, soundly and exhaustively, upon the thing itself and to determine whether the stated descriptions exist in it or whether they are things that the discussant describes either because of his capacity for discussion and smoothing things over or because he loves that thing and thinks well of it. If he finds that the thing itself is sublime and deserves those descriptions, let him drive from his mind the suspicion we have described. In itself, the law is sublime and excellent; it is more excellent than anything said about it and in it.

18 [643b-d] Then he explained that there is no way of knowing the truth of the laws and their excellence and the truth [10] of all things, except

through reason and exercise in reasoning; and that people must exercise and train themselves in it. Although initially their purpose may not be to understand the truth of the law, this training can be of benefit to them later on. He gave an example of this drawn from the arts; for example, the child who sets up doors and houses for play, whereby he acquires certain positive dispositions and accomplishments in the art in question, which become useful to him when he plans to acquire the art seriously.

19 [643d-644b] Then he d to the legislator and mentioned that training from childhood in political matters and reflection on their rightness and wrongness benefit him when he becomes seriously engaged in politics. Because of his earlier training and exercise, he will be able to control himself and face what confronts him with perseverance.

20 [644c-645c] Then he began to explain that there are in the soul of every human being two contrary powers that attract it in opposite directions and that one is subject to sorrow and gladness, pleasure and pain, and the other contraries. One of these two powers is the power of discernment; the other is the bestial power. The law operates through the power of discernment, not through the bestial power. He explained that the attraction exercised by the bestial power is strong and hard, while the attraction exercised by the power of discernment is softer and more gentle. The individual man must reflect on how his soul is faring in the presence of these attractions and follow the one exercised by the power of discernment. Likewise the whole citizen body: if by themselves they are incapable of discernment, they must accept the truth from their lawgivers, from those who follow in the latter's footsteps, from those who speak the truth about their laws, and from those who are good and righteous.

21 [646b-c] Then he explained that it is just and extremely right that one should bear the toil and discomfort commanded by the legislator

because it leads to comfort and virtue-just as the pain experienced by the one who drinks distasteful drugs is commendable because, in the end, it leads to the comfort of health.

22 [646e-647c] Then he explained that moral habits follow from and resemble one another and that one ought to distinguish them from their contraries. For instance, modesty is commendable, but in excess it becomes impotence and is blameworthy; having a good opinion of people is commendable and an expression of openheartedness but, if it is of one's enemies, it becomes blameworthy; and [11] caution is commendable, but in excess it becomes cowardice and inaction and thus is blameworthy. He explained, further, that it is blameworthy for a person to use means that are not commendable to reach his intended purpose-even though it may be extremely good and virtuous-and that it would be better if he could achieve what he intends through fair and preferable means.

23 [647c-649b] Then he mentioned something useful, that is, that an intelligent person must draw near evil things and know them in order to be able to avoid them and be more on guard against them. He gave an example drawn from wine drinking. He explained that the sober person ought to draw near the drunkards and attend their parties in order to know the base things that drunkenness breeds and in order to know how to avoid the base and blameworthy things that occur among them: that, for instance, after drinking a few cups, the one with the weak body may suppose himself strong although he is nothing of the sort (because he supposes himself strong, he wants to shout and fight, but his strength fails him), and numerous other things that happen to wine drinkers.

Then he explained that whoever wants to acquire one of the virtues should first exert himself in driving away the vice that opposes it. For it is very rare that virtue is acquired without the prior departure of vice.

25 [650b] Then he explained that every natural disposition has an activity especially suited to it. Hence the individual and the legislator must know this in order to match each one of the statutes he lays down with suitable and appropriate natural dispositions so that his statutes will not be dissipated. For when a thing is not properly placed, it will be dissipated and no trace of it left.

## Second Discourse

1 [653a] He explained in this Discourse that there are in a human being certain natural things that are the causes of one's moral habits and one's actions. Therefore the lawgiver ought to aim at these natural things, straighten them out, and legislate laws that straighten them out. For once these natural things are straightened out, the moral habits [12] and actions will be straightened out as well. (I suspect that by "children" [in this connection] he means all beginners, whether in age, knowledge, or religion [din].) He explained that these natural things are based on, and originate from, pleasure and pain; it is through these two that the virtues and the vices-and, later on, intelligence and the sciences-are acquired. The ordering of these two [that is, pleasure and pain] is called educating and training. Had the lawgiver commanded people to avoid pleasures altogether, his law would not have been rightly established and people would not have followed it, because of their natural inclination to pleasures. Instead, he appointed for them certain festivals and times during which they could pursue pleasures; in this way these pleasures become divine. This is also the case with the various kinds of music that [the lawgivers] have permitted, knowing that people are naturally inclined toward them and in order that taking pleasure in them will be divine. He gave such examples of this as were generally known among them, such as dancing and flute playing.

[654a-657a] He explained that everything is made up of that which is fair and that which is base. The fair kind of music is that which is suited to fine natural dispositions and promotes noble and useful moral habits-for instance, generosity and courage-and the base kind is that which promotes

contrary moral habits. He gave examples of this drawn from the tunes and the figures that had existed in the temples of Egypt and among the inhabitants of that country and had been instrumental in sustaining the traditions; he explained that they were divine.

[657d-658e] He explained, further, that whoever is younger in age is more prone to take delight in those pleasures, while the older he is the more calm and firm he will be. The skilled legislator is the one who introduces the law that charms everyone toward goodness and happiness. Furthermore, every group, every generation, and the inhabitants of every region have their own natural dispositions which differ from those of others. The skilled [legislator] is the one who introduces the kind of music and other conventional (sunan) statutes that control these natural dispositions and compel them to accept the law, regardless of the differences in the natural dispositions and the variety and multiplicity of their moral habits, not the one who introduces certain statutes that control some people and not others; for the latter [13] can be accomplished by the majority of the members of the group who practice it naturally.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the one who introduces a law that compels the obedience of a person who is knowledgeable, sophisticated, and experienced is more excellent than the one who introduces a law that compels the obedience of a group who are neither knowledgeable nor sophisticated: the former is like a singer who excites an old, sophisticated, rugged, and tenacious person.

[659c-e] The legislator and those who undertake to apply the law and assume the responsibilities it entails ought to control the many and different human affairs in every respect and in all their details so that none of these human affairs will escape them; for once [the citizens] become used to neglect on their part, they will find excuses whenever they can. And when a thing is neglected once, twice, or more, it is lost sight of and its edges are blunted—just as when it is used once or twice, it becomes an inescapable habit: it is fixed or obliterated to the extent that it is, respectively, used or neglected. The young in age and children have no knowledge of this, they should be made to accept it and to act accordingly. For if they get used to

enjoying themselves, to following their appetites, and to taking pleasure in what is contrary to the law, it will then be very hard to make them upright in accordance with the law. Rather, they should experience pleasure in [obeying] its rules; both men and children should be required to be in intimate association with the law and to follow it in practice.

[659d-660a] The, lawgiver ought to address every group of people with what is closer to their comprehension and intellects and make them upright by means of what they are capable of doing. For sometimes it is difficult for people to comprehend a thing, or they are incapable of doing it; its difficulty causes them to reject it and prompts them to abandon and discard it. He gave as an example of this the skilled and gentle physician who offers a sick person the drugs that are useful to him in his familiar and appetizing food.

2 [660d-661d] Then he meant to explain that the good is only relative, not absolute. He supported the soundness of his statement by the testimony of an ancient poem that mentions the things, such as health, beauty, and wealth, that some people consider good while others do not. He explained that all these things are good [14] for good people; for the evil and unjust, however, they are not good and do not lead them to happiness. Indeed, even life is evil for evil people, just as it is good for good people. Therefore it is correct to say that the good is only relative. This is a notion to which the legislator, likewise the poets, and also all those who write down their sayings, must pay great attention so that they will not be misunderstood.

3 [661d-663d] Then he explained that the assertion that all good things are immediately pleasant, that everything that is noble and good is pleasant, and that the contrary assertion is also valid is not demonstrable. For many pleasant things, namely, all things which are sources of pleasure to those of weak intellects, are not good. Upon my life, the good can be pleasant to the one who knows its outcome, but not to the one who has not ascertained that

outcome. The same applies to the assertion concerning the just ways of life and that they are opposed to [enjoyment of] the good things.

4 [665b-666d] Then he explained further that not all people need follow the same statutes, but that there are statutes for each group that the others need not follow. He gave an example of this drawn from flute playing performed by different age groups and how the conditions that call for flute playing and the use made of it differ among different people, whether they differ in age or in certain other conditions that characterize them at particular times. For when a thing is not used in its proper place, it will not have the glitter, the fair look, the approval, and the praise that it has when used in the appropriate place. He gave many examples of this; for example, it is not appropriate for an old man to play the flute or to dance, and if he does these or similar things at a public gathering, the public will not cheer or approve of it. Similarly, it is extremely objectionable and base for one to play the flute or dance on an occasion that does not call for such things. This is the case with everything that is done by an inappropriate person, or in a place or time [15] in which it is unseemly for such things to be done by such as he, or when the occasion does not call for them—all this is repulsive, inappropriate, and objectionable; it prompts the onlookers to reject it and to consider it base and repulsive, especially if they happen to lack sophistication.

5 [666d-668a] Then he explained that pleasures vary with respect also to different people, their conditions, natural dispositions, and moral habits. To explain this he gave examples of courageous persons and artisans. For what is pleasant to the practitioner of one art is different from what is pleasant to the practitioner of another art. The case is the same with what is proper, what is noble, and what is moderate.

6 [?] Then he spoke at length about this subject in order to explain that all these things are noble and base relative to other things and not noble and base in themselves. He said that, if one asks the artisans about this notion, they would undoubtedly confirm it.

7 [668c-669a] Then he explained that whoever does not know a thing's essence, identity, or being cannot know whether its parts are well ordered, whether it is suitable, its concomitants, and its consequences, simply by chasing after it; if someone claims he can do so, he is making a false claim. Also, the one who knows a thing's essence may not have noticed how fair or fine, or bad or base it is. The one who possesses perfect knowledge of a thing is he who knows the thing's essence, then how fair, then how fine or bad and base it is. This applies to laws and all the arts and sciences. Therefore the one who judges their fineness, or deficiency and badness, ought to have learned about them the three things mentioned above and mastered them well; only then should he judge them, so that his judgment may be right and proper. Even more excellent than a judge is the one who constructs and institutes a thing; for the one who constructs and institutes it, because he has the three kinds of knowledge mentioned above, is able, to institute what is appropriate for each condition. As for the one who lacks one of these three kinds of knowledge about a thing, and that power as well, how could he be able to institute and construct it? Nor is this peculiar to laws alone; it is true of every science and every art. He gave examples of this drawn from poems and their meters and tunes, and from music and those who compose it and play its various modes. [16]

8 [669b-671a; 673a-d] Then he spoke at length, mentioning dancing and flute playing. His entire purpose with these examples is to explain that each statute of Law and of tradition ought to be employed in the appropriate place and for those who are able to perform it; and that the corruption resulting from misplacing and misusing a thing is worse and uglier than what results from abandoning it altogether. He described the praise that was bestowed on those who played certain tunes, which were well known to them, in their proper places and to a suitable audience, and he mentioned



the blame bestowed on those who altered these tunes, tampered with them, and played them at inappropriate times, with the result that they stirred up many afflictions and evils. The art of singing occupied a wonderful position among the Greeks, and their legislators paid full attention to it. And it is truly very useful, especially because its working penetrates the soul; and since the law concerns itself with the soul, he spoke at length about this subject. For such training as the body needs is but for the sake of the soul; when the body is made fit, it leads to the fitness of the soul.

9 [671a-674c] Then he explained another notion suited to what he was describing, that is, that the same thing may be used in one law and abandoned in another. This is neither objectionable nor base, because the law is given with a view to the requirements of an existing situation so as to lead people to the ultimate good and to obedience to the gods. He gave an example of this drawn from wine and wine drinking: how one group of ancient Greeks used it while it was shunned by another group even in the case of necessity. The situation that necessarily demands drinking wine is that in which one needs to be deprived of intellect and knowledge for instance, in childbirth, cauterization, and the painful doctoring of the body; this is also the case when wine is used as a remedy by means of which to obtain the kind of health that nothing else could bring about.

### Third Discourse

1 [676a-677a] He began to explain that legislating the laws, their obliteration, and restoration are not novel at this time; rather, they had occurred in ancient times and will occur [17] in times to come. He explained that the corruption and obliteration of the law comes about in two ways: the one results from the passage of long periods of time and the other from universal cataclysms that befall the world, such as deluges and plagues that annihilate an entire people.

2 [677a-680a] Then he set out to explain how cultures develop; how the conditions which necessitate regimes and laws come into being, giving examples drawn from a deluge that floods all cities, after which a [new] city begins to come together and grow; how groups and cities, which he named and which were known to them at that time, were ruined and then replaced by other cities that grew up in their stead. Initially people had commendable moral habits; but when their numbers increased and they engaged in rivalry, these moral habits changed. For example, at that time-I mean in the aftermath of the deluge-people regarded each other cheerfully and were on familiar terms with one another. However, when their numbers increased, envy gradually began to spread among them until they hated each other, broke off relations, parted company, and waged war against one another. Moreover, at that time-I mean in the aftermath of the deluge-the arts had disappeared, until gradually, and impelled by their need, people began to develop them somewhat. Examples of this are mining minerals, harvesting plants, and constructing fortresses and houses, and other things not hard for anyone to know who studies the original work on which this book is based and reflects a little on what he understands from it until he knows that at first the arts are developed only insofar as they are necessities whereas later on they are for the sake of noble and fair things. For example, [at first] clothes are worn to cover and hide the genitals and to protect against heat and cold; later on they are chosen with an eye to what is fine and fair. The same can be said about all the other arts.

[680e-681a] He explained further that initially people made cities, fortresses, and shelters to fortify themselves against beasts, wild animals, and other harmful things; then, later on, after wars gradually spread among them, they began to fortify themselves against each other. [18]

[681a-682e] He explained further with respect to traditions how they come about and that sons only had those traditions that made up the way of life of their fathers. Then, later on, when those traditions led to

clannishness<sup>10</sup>, need impelled them first to a lawgiver of a general law that would unite the different ways of life, the members of numerous<sup>11</sup> households, and the descendents of numerous<sup>11</sup> ancestors, with regard to one thing embodying their well-being. He supported this with the statement of the poet Homer in describing the city of Ilium and why it came into being.

3 [682c-e] Then he explained the struggle for victory that stems from clannishness; how the citizens of one city hate and coerce those of another; and that these things are not useful since they are not in accordance with the law. He gave as an example those cities which the ancient Greeks besieged and vanquished, [mentioning] how their situation exemplifies this notion.

4 [683c-686c] Then he set out to explain that the ways of life of the inhabitants of a single city who follow the way of life of their king can be corrupted and vanquished in two ways only: one way is the corruption due to the people themselves and their abandoning beneficial practices; the other is due to the victory of another king over them. This latter way may be prompted by a [divine] law. When this is the case, one, two, or many kings may unite against a single city and compel it to accept the divine law. This is like what he mentioned in the examples drawn from cities generally known to them at that time.

He explained further that the citizens of some cities may corrupt their tradition sooner than the citizen of another city because of the bad natural dispositions of the group, as he explained in the examples he gave.

5 [686c-687e] Then he set out to explain that approval may lead people to adhere to the law and to mention that a person may approve of something not good in itself-how, then, should he proceed to approve of the law which

may be neither good nor conducive to happiness?-and to mention the difficulty in distinguishing such things. He gave as examples someone who sees a wonderful ship [19], approves of it and desires to possess it, or someone who sees and approves of splendid riches and wealth and so desires to possess them, although that may not be strictly speaking good. He explained further that a child may wish to possess things of which he approves as a child, but when he gets older, he will neither wish for nor approve of them even though the things themselves are the very same and have not changed.

6 [?] Then he demonstrated that the thing that receives approval which is truly good is better<sup>12</sup> than what receives approval but is not good. Therefore he said, "We ourselves see that the father does not approve of the same thing that the child approves of. Rather the father, being intelligent while the child is not, beseeches God to put an end to the child's approval. The fair and noble in itself is the thing of which intelligent people approve, whereas what is approved of by one who is not intelligent, be it a child, an adult, or an old man, is that which should be rejected."

7 [688e-689c] Then he explained a fair notion, namely, that it is the intellect that testifies to the truth and goodness of the law and exhorts to it. Therefore the legislator must attend to the things that foster intellect in souls and he must take care of them completely, since the more secure this is, the more secure and reliable the matter of the law will be. Now breeding<sup>13</sup> is what fosters intellect because whoever lacks breeding finds pleasure in evil things whereas whoever has breeding finds no pleasure except in what is good. The law is the path to good things, their fount, and their origin. It follows, then, that the legislator must establish breeding as firmly as he can.

8 Then he explained that once breeding is instilled in the natural dispositions of the rulers of cities and their counterparts, it will result in their

preferring and approving of good things and testifying to their truth. And harmony<sup>14</sup> among the testimonies of those who have breeding is the wisdom to be preferred.

9 [689e-690c] Then he explained that the affair of the city can only be complete when the city includes those who are rulers and those who are ruled. Examples of the rulers are those who are virtuous, old, and experienced. The ruled are all those who are [20] inferior to these: children, youths, and those who are ignorant. Whenever this is the case, the affair of the city will be extremely correct.

10 [690d-691a] Then he set out to explain that, when kings and rulers lack breeding, their affair and that of their communities will become corrupt, as he explained in the examples he gave of Greek kings who were not knowledgeable. Therefore they corrupted the affair of their communities and their own affair to the point where their cities were ruined. Ignorance is more harmful in kings than among the populace.

11 [691c] Then he explained that the citizens cannot dispense with a ruler with breeding and an agreeable regime to run their affairs properly, just as the body cannot dispense with nourishment nor the ship the sail. Likewise the soul cannot dispense with a regimen or else its affair will become corrupt, as he explained in connection with the Messanians.<sup>15</sup> Just as the sick body can neither bear toil nor function in a fine or useful manner, so the sick soul can neither distinguish nor choose what is finer and more useful. Now the sickness of the soul consists in its lacking the character traits [promoted by] the divine regime.

12 Then he gave examples of rulers who, supposing themselves to be learned and to have breeding while not being so, pursued victory and thereby corrupted things.

13 [693a-696a] Then he explained that the legislator should take great care of the matter of friendship and freedom in order to make people attached to both of them, so that the laws will be quickly established and easy to effect.<sup>16</sup> Otherwise the matter will be hard and difficult for him.

He explained further that a multiplicity of rulers will corrupt the matter and that the aim of the lawgiver must be exclusive rule, or else his progress towards his aim will be interrupted. His law, once proclaimed, will not endure unless he aims at being the single, exclusive source of law because this matter cannot withstand compromise and dissimulation.

He explained further that the way of freedom is the most useful and the finest for the legislator to follow and that a ruler should not be envious, because envy is a slavish moral habit and a slave will never achieve complete rule. If the matter proceeds in accordance with the way of freedom, those who are ruled will obey with appetite and cheerfulness and will be more likely to continue in this. For these notions and their contraries he gave examples drawn from the Persians, their kings, and their moral habits, speaking about them at length.

14 [696a-700a] Then he set out to explain the division of the virtues and character traits, which of them is prior and which emphatically posterior, which of them stands apart by itself and which does not stand apart from its accompaniment. For example, temperance is not beneficial when it does not go together with justice, and similarly the rest of the virtues and character traits. He mentioned that the legislator must [21] distinguish these moral

habits, proceeding to do whatever is necessary to order them and exhort others to them, and make people accept and adhere to them in the way of freedom and not in the way of slavery, because it was the corruption engendered by slavery that he mentioned in the examples he gave of the Persians. Then there occurred a useful notion in his tales of the Persians and the transfer of authority from their king to his son and the war they waged at sea, namely, that the enemies in one city, when something terrible strikes, become friends. Therefore the legislator must investigate whether the friendship among the followers of his law is of this variety or not, so that he can run his governance accordingly with certainty and knowledge, and thereby prevent harm and corruption from affecting the law in that manner.

15 [700a-702b] Then he rushed on to explain the matter of the music provided for by the statutes of those ancient traditions. He explained a certain aspect of it he had already mentioned before, namely, the well-being derived from accepting traditions in the way of freedom and the corruption engendered by accepting them in the way of slavery and coercion. He mentioned what is offensive and distasteful about slavery, and that, when the affair of the city is not based on spontaneous friendship, though breeding and perfect intellect, then it is destined to ruin and corruption. On the other hand, when these three are present, the city is destined to goodness and happiness. The argument about a whole city, one household, and one man, is the same.

#### Fourth Discourse

1 [704a-705b] He set out now in this Discourse to explain that the true city is neither the place called "city" nor a gathering of people. Rather, it has preconditions which include [the following]. (1) That its citizens accept the traditions of the regimes. (2) That it have a divine administrator. (3) That these citizens manifest commendable and praiseworthy moral habits and customs. And (4) that its territory be naturally suitable [22] for importing the provisions the citizens need and everything else indispensable to them.

2 (705d-707a] Then he explained another notion, namely, that the law legislated for the citizens is not merely for the purpose of being heard and obeyed; rather it is also for the purpose of engendering commendable moral habits and agreeable customs. He mentioned another notion, namely, that a person whose customs and moral habits are not in accordance with the law, noble, and agreeable, will always be deteriorating and regressing; and it is base for a person to regress as he gets older. He gave as an example courageous persons who neglect to exercise to the point where they are forced to take up lowly arts and occupations such as sailing and the like. He gave an example drawn from a poem of Homer that was generally known to them and one about a lion that neglected itself to the point where its courage slipped away and it came to fear mountain goats,

3 [709b-e] Then he started to explain this notion in relation to an entire city. He also explained that it is good fortune<sup>17</sup> for a city if the one who institutes its traditions is skilled, knowledgeable, and well trained with regard to all instances of good fortune connected with prosperity and other things; and, further, that it is good fortune for the legislator to have citizens who listen, obey, and are ready to accept the traditions embodied in regimes.

4 [709e-712b] Then he set out to explain the matter of despotism; that there may be a need for it when the citizens are not good persons with fine natural dispositions; and that despotism is only blamable when the ruler is naturally disposed to be despotic and uses despotism to satisfy his appetites, not because he needs to do so for the sake of the citizens. For when the city is such that the governor cannot dispense with coercing it, and so he does that and institutes there traditions that are divine, then this is very commendable and agreeable.

5 [710e-711d] Then he explained that the despotism that takes place in this manner is more appropriate and easier in many respects than [the way



of] choice since, by confronting the citizens with despotism, the one who institutes traditions can make them upright in the shortest time. In contrast, the one who [23] is not despotic, but proceeds in accordance with the way of freedom, cannot dispense with being gentle; and to proceed gently requires a long time.

6 Then he explained that despotism and coercion are extremely bad for those who are free and virtuous just as they are extremely fine for those who are slaves and evil. He gave examples of the Cnossans<sup>18</sup> and citizens of other cities generally known to them.

7 [713a-714a?] Then he explained that, the better the citizens are, the more divine is their ruler (and, therefore, their ruler is much more excellent than the rulers of a less excellent city); so that this situation may develop to the point where the administrator of a city will partake of the genus of divine beings and have little in common with those humans. He gave as an example of this notion the citizens of a city generally known to them.

8 [714b] Then he explained that the kinds of regimes correspond numerically to the kinds of traditions, because regimes conform to traditions inasmuch as they draw their strength from them and are constructed on the basis of them; further, the kinds of rule and ways of life also correspond to them numerically; if the one is fine, then so is the other; if bad, then bad; and if superior, then superior-with only a slight discrepancy in truth.

9 [714c-716b] Then he explained that the vain ruler who cherishes his own beauty, wealth, lineage, or any of his virtues is not commendable or agreeable since the greatest concern of the ruler should be the well-being of those who are ruled. He who is arrogant is only concerned with himself and his own fate and thereby incurs the gods' displeasure; and whoever incurs

their displeasure will not receive their support, without which he will not leave a noble and agreeable heritage.

10 [716c-718c] Then he set out to describe him and to explain the things he should care for. He should begin with the fate of the body, next that of the soul, and then external things in that order. He gave examples and spoke at length on this subject because of its great usefulness. He ended up with a discussion of the rights and duties of sons and fathers, how to fulfill them, what these are when they start out in life and what they are when they reach the end of their days. [24]

11 [718d-719a] Then he explained what both the difficulty and the ease of this virtuous path consist in, giving an example drawn from a generally known poem.

12 [719b-e] Then he explained that a poet, a disputant, and a discussant may say both a thing and its contrary, whereas the one who attends to the traditions should only defend the one thing that is useful to him.

13 Then he gave an example of that drawn from some rules of Laws, namely, burying and shrouding the dead; how the legislator should command these practices; and how those others, whom we enumerated, 19 tend to talk about them.

14 [719e-720e] Then he explained how the law should be instilled in people's hearts, giving as an example a doctor who treats children with kindness. He mentioned that doctors have servants who imitate them. Likewise there are judges who emulate legislators in giving guidance. They must employ extreme kindness in restoring traditions and in preserving them for the people.

15 [720e-722c] Then he explained that the city only begins to flourish as a result of the law concerning marriage and procreation. Therefore that law must be extremely refined and precise. He mentioned certain things-like the fines and punishments embodied in those traditions generally known in those times-in connection with how wrong it is to neglect this point.

16 [722c-723b] Then he set out to explain that, for traditions to become established in the citizens' hearts, preludes must be made prior to instituting the traditions. Of these preludes, some are accidental and depend on good fortune, others are imposed, and still others are natural. The accidental preludes are like a mishap that befalls the citizens and corrupts the relations among them, so that they are impelled to adopt a tradition that brings them together and unites their concerns and their views. Natural preludes are like the corruption that comes about as a result of the passage of long and extended periods of time and because of the weariness that affects people because they are naturally disposed to it. Imposed preludes are like proclamations effected through discussion and clarifications by means of arguments. Thus, if these three [kinds of] preludes take place [25], people's desire to follow traditions will be genuine and they will be impelled toward them so that, when they find them, they will accept them cheerfully.

Then there is another kind of prelude not belonging to the genus of these three, namely, the commendable and noble moral habits that legislators, their judges, and their followers extol so that the ignorant and children become habituated to them. Once the moral habits become positive dispositions, these people will be led to accept traditions more easily and hasten to adhere to them more quickly, because evil people are not led to good things easily as are moderate people.

17 [724a-b] Then he himself promised to explain later on what is required for the matter of the citizens' soul, their bodies, habits, and characters.

#### Fifth Discourse

1 [726a-727e] He explains in this Discourse that the matter of the soul is the first thing to be cared for because it is the noblest of things and ranks third in divinity. The most worthy kind of care that can be bestowed on it is honor, since contempt of the soul is base. He explained that honor is one of the divine matters and the noblest of them; since the soul is noble, it should therefore be honored. Satisfying the soul's appetite does not honor it since, were this the case, a child and similarly an ignorant person should satisfy the appetites of their souls because they suppose the appetites of their souls to be directed toward fine and preferable things; and yet much harm would result from their satisfying those appetites. On the contrary, honoring the soul consists in disciplining it and satisfying those appetites praised divine traditions. The more the laws condemn them, the more it is an act of honoring the soul to keep it from them, even if this is painful at the moment. Whoever thinks that the body is nobler than the soul on the grounds that the latter could not exist were it not for the former is in error; his error will become clear with the slightest effort.

2 [727e-728a] Then he explained how the soul should be honored in most human activities such as [26] amassing wealth and other things.

3 [728a] Then he pointed out how the soul is honored by saying, "[The citizens] should be made to accept instruction from the legislator because this matter is his affair."

4 [728c-729a] Then he also mentioned that one must honor the body after honoring the soul. He explained that it is not the beautiful, powerful,

swift, sound, or fat body that is honorable, but the one that follows commendable and agreeable habits and ways of life in agreement with traditions. The way to honor the body is to follow moral discipline. He explained this notion, discussing it at length and giving useful, clear examples.

5 [729a-c] Then he set out to explain that the traditions for disciplining children to honor the body are the very same as those for disciplining middle-aged and old people when they are ignorant.

6 [729c-730b] Then he explained that the same traditions apply concerning honors for the soul with respect to strangers, kinsmen, and citizens, whereas traditions concerning bodily discipline that are meant for strangers should be distinct from the ones meant for kinsmen, because disciplining bodies includes punishments for crimes. If a stranger and a kinsman are treated equally in this, it will lead to traditions and laws being corrupt.

7 [730b-732b] Then he explained how one should proceed on the path to acquiring the moral virtues and that spending time is indispensable in this because a habit is only formed when practiced over a period of time, in every social situation, and together with all groups; otherwise it will not become a habit. The path to habituation in justice, temperance, courage, and other things is the same; likewise removing blamable things requires time in which a person accustoms himself to abandoning base things. If a human being is not high-minded or has no natural strong indignation, one's soul's training cannot be at all complete because a human being is naturally disposed to overlook most of one's beloved's faults-and there is no beloved more beloved to a person than one's soul. If this is the case, strong indignation is indispensable if one is to restrain one's beloved soul from appetites that are a source of pleasure to one. In this situation, anger alone is useful in keeping

one from approving of all one's soul does, accustoming it instead to one's displeasure from the start.

8 [732b-d] Then he explained that people with breeding must first command their own souls to abandon immoderate actions [27], such as perpetual gladness, excessive laughter, intense sadness, excessive grief, and the like. Once they have commanded their own souls this, they must command it of their subordinates.

9 [732d-734e] Then he mentioned that they must seek the gods' assistance in connection with all these character traits and their acquisition, by beseeching and invoking the gods and asking their assistance in what they are doing so that their undertaking will be in accordance with the law, and commendable and divine. A person must also strengthen one's hope in the gods so that one's existence will be more felicitous and one's way of life more noble. A noble way of life may be noble in the eyes of one group and not another or it may be noble in the eyes of the gods. One must consider this and reflect upon it thoroughly.

He spoke about this notion at length and explained the chosen way of life in connection with each moral habit and statute. He enumerated some of them by way of examples until he mentioned temperance. He explained that choosing the pleasurable over the painful is the way of life of compulsion, while choosing the painful over the pleasurable is the way of life of choice.

10 [734e-735a] Then he also mentioned this in connection with health, courage, knowledge....